

# CALIFORNIA OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

## MEDICAL ASSISTANTS

CALIFORNIA OCCUPATIONAL GUIDE - NUMBER 513  
2005

INTEREST AREA  
SOCIAL



### WHAT DOES A MEDICAL ASSISTANT DO?

MEDICAL ASSISTANTS greet patients in medical offices or other medical settings where they help doctors with examination and treatment. They give shots and medication and run routine lab tests such as urinalysis and blood counts. Assistants instruct patients about medication and self-treatment. They prepare treatment rooms for patient examination and sterilize and arrange instruments and equipment used in treatment and diagnosis. They check office and lab supplies and keep the waiting, consulting, and examination rooms neat and orderly.

Medical Assistants perform the following tasks:

- Help physicians examine and treat patients, handing them instruments and materials or performing such tasks as giving injections and removing sutures.
- Record patients' medical history, vital statistics and information such as test results in medical records.
- Interview patients to obtain medical information and measure their vital signs, weight, and height.
- Inventory and order medical, lab, and office supplies and equipment.
- Contact medical facilities or departments to schedule patients for tests and/or admission.
- Show patients to examination rooms and prepare them for the physician.
- Give physiotherapy treatments, such as diathermy, galvanics, and hydrotherapy.
- Operate x-ray, electrocardiogram (EKG), and other equipment to administer routine diagnostic tests.

Medical Assistants do a variety of clerical tasks such as making appointments and completing insurance forms. Those in small offices usually handle both the clerical and clinical duties.

Podiatric Medical Assistants make castings of feet, take and develop x-rays, and assist podiatrists in surgery. Ophthalmic Medical Assistants measure and record vision and test eye muscle function. They teach patients how to insert, remove, and care for contact lenses. Under the direction of the physician, they may administer eye medications. They prepare optical and surgical instruments and may assist the ophthalmologist in surgery.

## WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT?

Important skills, knowledge, and abilities for Medical Assistants include:

- **Service Orientation** – Actively looking for ways to help people.
- **Writing** – Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.
- **Active Listening** – Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
- **Speaking** – Talking to others to convey information effectively.
- **Social Perceptiveness** – Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do.
- **Medicine and Dentistry** – Knowledge of symptoms, treatment alternatives, drug properties and interactions, and preventive health-care measures that relate to medicine and dentistry.
- **Clerical** – Knowledge of administrative and clerical procedures and systems such as word processing, managing files and records, stenography and transcription, designing forms, and other office procedures and terminology.
- **Biology** – Knowledge of plant and animal organisms, their tissues, cells, functions, interdependencies, and interactions with each other and the environment.
- **Oral Comprehension** – The ability to listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
- **Information Ordering** – The ability to arrange things or actions in a certain order or pattern according to a specific rule or set of rules (e.g., patterns of numbers, letters, words, pictures, mathematical operations).
- **Arm-Hand Steadiness** – The ability to keep your hand and arm steady while moving your arm or while holding your arm and hand in one position.

Medical Assistants deal with patients from many cultures. To obtain information for the doctor,

Medical Assistants need the ability to put patients at ease and get them to talk freely. This is especially important with patients who are reluctant to discuss their reason for seeing the doctor and those with limited English-speaking skills.

## WHAT'S THE WORK ENVIRONMENT?

Medical Assistants usually work in bright, air-conditioned offices. They lift, stand, stoop, and walk to do their work. They constantly interact with other people and may have to handle several responsibilities at once.

Uniforms are usually required and may be supplied by employers.

### *Union Membership*

Medical Assistants working for hospitals and nursing homes can usually join the Health Care Workers division of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

## WHAT'S THE CALIFORNIA JOB OUTLOOK?

The following information is from the occupational projections produced by the Employment Development Department (EDD) Labor Market Information Division (LMID):

Medical Assistants	
Estimated number of workers in 2002:	50,700
Estimated number of workers in 2012:	74,000
Projected Growth 2002-2012:	46.0%
Est. openings due to separations by 2012:	9,400

*These figures do not include self-employment.*

This occupation will grow much faster than average compared with all occupations in California.

There will be a total of 32,700 job opportunities in this occupation during the projections period.

### *Trends*

Employment growth is expected because of the increase in the number of group practices, clinics, and other healthcare facilities that need greater numbers of support personnel, particularly the

flexible Medical Assistant who can handle both administrative and clinical duties.

Because many health care employers prefer a trained staff, job prospects should be best for Medical Assistants with formal training or experience.

## WHAT DOES THE JOB PAY?

### *California Earnings*

The following information is from the Occupational Employment Statistics Survey of Employers by EDD/LMID:

#### Medical Assistants 2005 Wages

Hourly wages range from	\$10.95 to \$16.00
Average hourly wage	\$13.89
Average annual wage	\$28,890

*These figures do not include self-employment.*

A recent California Medical Assisting Association survey shows a range from \$8.50 to \$18.50 per hour. According to this survey Medical Assistants in Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay areas earn the highest wages.

### *Hours*

Most full-time Medical Assistants work a regular 40-hour week. Some work part-time, evenings, or weekends. Many employers hire part-time Assistants.

### *Benefits*

Benefits normally include vacation, time off for holidays, health and dental insurance, and retirement plans.

## HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE JOB?

The first step is to decide if you would like to work as a Medical Assistant. Job satisfaction and willingness to stay on the job usually comes from doing work that holds your interest. People who like this work usually have a social interest. This means they truly like to help others, talk to them, teach them how to do things, and provide services.

Medical Assistants need good judgment to handle confidential medical records and tact to deal with patients. Good health is needed. Almost all employers require a physical examination before hiring.

### *Education and Training*

Most employers require a high school diploma or a General Education Development (GED) equivalency.

Training is readily available. About 50 community and private colleges throughout the State have medical assisting programs. Many adult education programs, regional occupational programs (ROP), and vocational schools also offer the training. Contact schools in your area to locate medical assisting training programs.

Certificate programs usually take one year, an associate degree will take two years. Courses cover anatomy, physiology, and medical terminology as well as typing, transcription, record keeping, accounting, and insurance processing. Students learn laboratory techniques, clinical and diagnostic procedures, pharmaceutical principles, medication administration, and first aid. They study office practices, patient relations, medical law, and ethics.

Some medical assisting programs include an internship providing hands-on experience in a physician's office, hospital, or other healthcare facility.

### *Licensing and Certification*

Medical Assistants do not have to be licensed or certified to work in California. However, certification can be a good career step in job competition, promotions, and higher pay.

A California Certified Medical Assistant has met the qualifications established by the California Certifying Board for Medical Assistants, Inc. and has passed a comprehensive examination prepared and administered by this board. Completion of at least one of the following examination requirements:

- Graduation within one year preceding the examination from a medical assisting program accredited by the American Board of Health Education Schools, or completion of an equivalent program in the military, community or private college, adult education, or ROP.
- Current employment as a medical assistant by a licensed physician or podiatrist.
- At least two years experience as a Medical Assistant within the five years immediately prior to applying for the examination.

Medical Assistants can also opt to become Registered Medical Assistant (RMA). Graduates of an accredited medical assisting program that have at least five years of medical assisting experience qualify to take the RMA examination given by the American Medical Technologists Association. Go to their Web site at [www.amt1.com](http://www.amt1.com) for more information.

### ***Continuing Education***

Certified Medical Assistants must renew their certificate every five years. At least 60 credits are required during the five years immediately preceding the application for certificate renewal.

### **HOW DO I FIND THE JOB?**

Medical Assistants can register with the student placement office where they attended medical assisting training. Most schools provide lifelong job placement help.

Certified Medical Assistants who belong to California Medical Assistants Association can network with other association members.

Direct contact to employers remains one of the most effective job search methods. Most Medical Assistants work in the offices of medical doctors and in hospitals.

Search these **yellow page** headings for listings of private firms:

- Physicians and Surgeons, M.D.
- Clinics
- Hospitals

The following Internet resources can be helpful to the job search process:

America's Career InfoNet  
[www.acinet.org](http://www.acinet.org)

America's Job Bank  
[www.ajb.dni.us](http://www.ajb.dni.us)

CalJOBS<sup>SM</sup>  
[www.caljobs.ca.gov](http://www.caljobs.ca.gov)

Job Search and Resume Writing  
[www.worksmart.ca.gov/success\\_tips\\_menu.html](http://www.worksmart.ca.gov/success_tips_menu.html)

Local Job Service Offices  
[www.edd.ca.gov/jsrep/jsloc.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/jsrep/jsloc.htm)

Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) Online  
<http://online.onetcenter.org>

One-Stop Career Centers List  
[www.edd.ca.gov/ONE-STOP/pic.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/ONE-STOP/pic.htm)

For statewide and local projections, wages, employers by county, and other occupational information go to [www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov](http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov) and select *Find an Occupation Profile*.

### **WHERE CAN THE JOB LEAD?**

With additional training a Medical Assistant can become a licensed vocational nurse or registered nurse.

### **OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

California Medical Assistants Association  
P.O. Box 52656  
Riverside, CA 92517  
(888) 464-2622 (Membership)  
(866) 622-2262 (Certification)  
[www.cmaa-ca.org](http://www.cmaa-ca.org)

American Association of Medical Assistants  
20 North Wacker Drive, Suite 1575  
Chicago, IL 60606-2963  
(312) 899-1500  
[www.aama-ntl.org](http://www.aama-ntl.org)

American Medical Technologists Association  
710 Higgins Road  
Park Ridge, IL 60068-5765  
(847) 823-5169  
[www.amt1.com](http://www.amt1.com)

#### RELATED OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technologists	No. 17
Dental Assistants	No. 27
Veterinary Technicians (Animal Health Technicians)	No. 402
Hospital Admitting Managers and Clerks	No. 409
Physical Therapy Aides and Assistants	No. 451
Optometric Technicians/Optometric Assistants	No. 470

#### OCCUPATIONAL CODE REFERENCES

**SOC** (*Standard Occupational Classification*)

Medical Assistants	31-9092
--------------------	---------

**O\*NET** (*Occupational Information Network*)

Medical Assistants	31-9092.00
--------------------	------------

**OES** (*Occupational Employment Statistics*)

Medical Assistants	66005
--------------------	-------